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Presidential Proclamation - National School Lunch Week!

Burlington School to Receive National Award from USDA

MONTPELIER – President Obama proclaimed this week (October 14 – 20, 2012) National School Lunch week. The President understands that our children are the key to America's success, stating that it is crucial that they have the resources they need to reach their greatest potential – including access to healthy, nutritious, and delicious meals at school.

Commissioner Vilaseca poses the question "When was the last time you had a school lunch?" The school cafeteria has changed over the years, it has become the largest classroom in the school – it's not just a place to eat, but a place to learn. "The cafeteria is one of the places I like to go when visiting schools. It's a fun place to be – a place where I can feel the pulse of the school community."

This year has brought changes to the National School Lunch Program requirements. These changes meet new federal nutrition standards and ensure that our children are getting the right nutrition, establishing healthy life-long eating habits.

"As with any change, this brings challenges and opportunities," said Vilaseca. "Many Vermont schools were already meeting the new requirements, so it wasn't a drastic change. Students are required to add fruits and veggies to their trays (all they can eat), and schools are incorporating lean proteins, low-fat or fat-free milk, lower sodium options, and more age-appropriate portions."

Over the summer, the Department's Child Nutrition team partnered with Vermont FEED and the Vermont School Nutrition Association to host a Summer Institute. School food service staff, nurses, classroom teachers, and child care staff from around Vermont gathered to learn more about local foods that fit the most recent Dietary Guidelines. School personnel studied new meal pattern requirements, food safety and sanitation, and took an in-depth look at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods Program.

"It is so important to encourage our kids to eat healthy meals, to exercise, and to understand why," said Commissioner Vilaseca. "Vermont is already known for our wholesome environment, our safe, green, and healthy schools, and as a good place to raise your children. We are innovators here in Vermont, and our schools inspire our students to lead the change."

For example, earlier this year Bristol Elementary and eight Burlington area schools received the Bronze Award of Distinction from the USDA's Healthier US School Challenge (HUSSC). More recently, the Brewster Pierce School in Huntington was awarded the Gold Award of Distinction. The HUSSC awards are a way for the USDA to recognize schools that have created healthier

school environments through improvements in the quality of food while providing both nutrition and physical education to promote healthy lifestyles. HUSSC is a key component in Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign.

On Wednesday, October 17, the Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes will be hosting the Burlington Healthier US School Challenge award ceremony where representatives from the USDA will be presenting the Burlington School District with the prestigious HUSSC award.

Commissioner Vilaseca believes in bolstering school nutrition knowledge and food offerings, and supports farmers and schools working together to provide as much locally grown produce as possible to Vermont's kids. Vilaseca strongly encourages all schools to explore federal programs that can allow schools to provide meals and snacks not only during the school-day, but also for the children after school, during school vacations, and throughout the summer.

More information about the Healthier US School Challenge can be found online:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html> or

http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_nutrition/school_nutrition/funding.html.

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